

**Volume II
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QUOTABLE

What we become depends on what we read after all the professors are finished with us. The greatest university of all is the collection of books.

— *Tomas Carlyle, historian*

Inside

Lots of stuff, including introductions to the newest staffers, an editorial on cheap talk and how one-on-one tutoring is the way to go these days.

LEARN Alive!

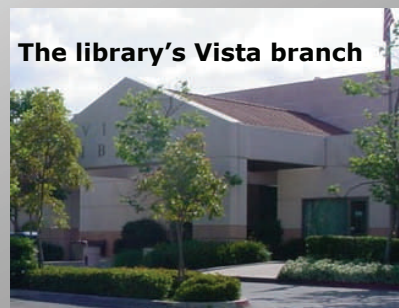


LEARN embarks on new Vista amid wholesale changes in staff

By MARTIN JONES WESTLIN
Editor/publisher, LEARN Alive!

The more things change, the more they — uh — *change*. That's the cool thing about LEARN — it actively seeks its highest and best use, constantly shifting its focuses (and creating new ones, if need be) in the best interests of those who need it most. Its latest and most ambitious undertaking is almost an hour from El Cajon, but that's not the point. What matters is service to the nearly 450,000 San Diego County adults who struggle with reading and writing — and for those who live to the north, help just got a little closer. See **Vista**, page 2

The library's Vista branch



Of newsletters, blogs and you

Last year's editions of LEARN Alive! yielded the very definition of clinical exhaustion. Not only couldn't we regroup in time for January; we had to relinquish the publishing to an outside company *and* rehire its figurehead into AmeriCorps (such is the nature of the exceptionally hard bargain he drives). Martin Jones Westlin, a 2006 LEARN staff member and part-time AmeriCorps volunteer, now publishes **LEARN Alive!** each month through Editorial Arts, his La Mesa arts-oriented news firm. In March, he agreed to serve a second year as a literacy tutor and will assist in spearheading the creation of LEARN's new blog. The blog is designed to act as a readily updatable supplement to **LEARN Alive!** — but it's so new that it doesn't even have a name yet, poor thing. Stay tuned.



Martin Jones Westlin

Race for Literacy: LEARN on the run

It commands its fair share of press every year, if only because it's sponsored by the county's largest daily paper. But *The San Diego Union-Tribune's* Race for Literacy, scheduled to start in Balboa Park Saturday and Sunday, May 5 and 6, is also correctly billed as San Diego's favorite (and biggest) race. Some 4,000 walkers, runners and other literacy advocate types will head for their respective finish lines over the two days, making it the second-largest event of its kind in the nation.

LEARN, of course, has its stable of entrants, itching to compete (or stay on their feet, whichever comes first) in the run/walk from Balboa Park to downtown. The event touts and

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Vista *(continued from page 1)*

The County Library's Vista branch, at 700 Eucalyptus Ave., is the site of LEARN's new facility — and except for the fact that it's brand-new, it offers the same services as does the anchor venue in El Cajon. It's expected that it will draw patronage from nearby cities such as San Marcos, Oceanside, Poway and Carlsbad. And although evidence of specific trends is a ways off, AmeriCorps member Misa Aldenderfer says that the groundwork for such studies is being established.

"We've had a lot of outreach efforts in the area," Aldenderfer said, "and it's starting to show. We seem to do at least a few assessments a week. Tutors in the area are calling to find out about the trainings."

Having more staff, Aldenderfer added, certainly helps — and



Spit-shine and a view to match: LEARN's North County headquarters, in the Vista branch library, is the latest element in the literacy program's growth since its founding in July of 2005. While it's estimated that 450,000 San Diego County adults need counseling on their literacy skills, some 75,000 received that help during 2006.

LEARN Alive!

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Editorial consultants: Janice Wilhelm, Kevin Vigil, Michael Burch, Tony Moore, Misa Aldenderfer, Elizabeth Lohr

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That's where Elizabeth Lohr and Tony Moore step into the picture. Lohr, a full-time library associate and tutor based at the new venue, has a master of arts in linguistics from the University of Montana, and her international travels have fueled her



Elizabeth Lohr



Tony Moore



Michael Burch

fascination with dialects and peoples. Tony Moore, who splits his time between Vista and El Cajon, has followed much the same path amid his world travels and his passion for instruction in literacy. Full-time AmeriCorps member Michael Burch is also a law student who seeks a career in legal management of visual arts venues. Janice Wilhelm replaced Amanda Schukle, LEARN's original central figure, now stationed at headquarters in a new capacity. And that's enough for now.

Race *(continued from page 1)*

otherwise benefits The San Diego Council on Literacy, comprising more than 20 literacy programs in San Diego County. These programs provide one-on-one, small group, and classroom literacy services for children, adults, and families.



Saturday's events start at 8 a.m. at 6th Avenue and Laurel Street and include the Kids' Magic Mile, a series of one-mile walks and runs for kids 12 and under. The adults get their chance Sunday at 8 a.m. The 8-kilometer race starts near the Organ Pavilion in Balboa Park, runs down Highway 163, and finishes at Pantoja Park on G Street in downtown San Diego. For more information, call the Council at 619-574-1641.

Upwards of 4,000 contestants entered 2007's Race for Literacy, second largest run of its kind in the nation.

Computer classes in Arabic

In response to requests fielded during community library needs assessment studies, the San Diego County Library announces an eight-week series of free computer-use classes in Arabic and English. Classes feature instruction in computer skills with a focus on the Internet and the Library's online information sources. The El Cajon branch library, 201 E. Douglas Ave., will hold classes Sundays from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.; Mondays and Fridays from 3 to 4:30 p.m.; and Tuesdays and Thursdays from 8:30 to 10 a.m. in the branch's literacy office. For more information, contact Jacqueline Ayala at (858) 694-2448 or Safa Arabo at (619) 469-2151.

Everybody get the memo?

San Diego County literacy report cites a frighteningly present-day conclusion

It's said that the only difference between the present and the future is that the future isn't here yet. And it doesn't take much to see the sense in that. The 2003 Detroit Tigers were one of the worst baseball squads in the history of the universe, and the teams had compiled an absolutely abysmal win-loss record in the ten campaigns before that — but this is one of the most storied franchises in the sport, and America knew it would eventually make its way back into the city's and the fans' good graces. A measly three years later, the Tigers found themselves in the World Series, rounding out one of modern baseball's greatest successes. (Full disclosure: The St. Louis Cardinals won the Fall Classic four games to one. Fuller disclosure: The Series was probably fixed, damn it.)

This may seem off point for an editorial about a report called *The State of Adult Literacy in San Diego County: Parents, Residents and Workers for Today and Tomorrow*, published last month by the San Diego Council on Literacy — but the connection isn't that difficult once you get the hang of it. Just as everybody suspected the Tigers would generate a resurgence one of these years, the literacy document declares something we knew all along: San Diego County's literacy figures reflect a singularly sorry state of affairs. Below-basic-level reading and writing populations in the region have increased by approximately 1 million in the last ten minutes; parental illiteracy is actually 112 percent higher than the rate among children in any given household; the inability to read among Hispanics and Native Americans is at its highest level since the Crucifixion. Fifty-four pages of the same foreboding black and white, looking for all the world like the Tigers' stat sheets from 2003, when the team lost a stratospheric 119 games.

The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn.

— Alvin Toffler

The striking thing about all this isn't the county's literacy straits; dire as they may be, the problems are clearly surmountable. At the risk of betraying some mild facetiousness, I submit that we were all illiterate at one point in our lives — and although traditional demographic success rates crazily vary, they *do* reflect reasons to believe that virtually all of us have retained at least a degree of muscle memory that, once tapped, can lead to startlingly wonderful results under ideal learning conditions.

It's not even the revelation that parents play a key role in their children's literal competency. The report does a very good job breaking down the related figures accordingly and in intimating that learning, unlearning and relearning (see above quote) is fundamentally a phenomenon of home life.

What's really baffling is the report's conclusion. Not only doesn't it cite San Diego County by name; it resorts to the same generic rhetoric we've seen since we were — uh — old enough to read. All that statistical *sturm und drang*, only to be washed away amid an anticlimax from something called *America's Perfect Storm: Three Forces Changing Our Nation's Future*, attributed to two guys from the Educational Testing Service and a professor from far-flung Northeastern University.

"If we continue on our current course...," it reads, "it is likely that our nation will gradually lose ground in relation to other countries, becoming more divided both socially and economically in the process. If we are unable to substantially close the existing skill gaps among racial/ethnic groups and substantially boost the literacy levels of the population as a whole, demographic forces will result in a U.S. population in 2030 with tens of millions of adults unable to meet the requirements of the new economy. Moreover, a substantial proportion of those adults will be members of disadvantaged minority groups who will likely consider themselves outside the economic mainstream. Clearly, this is not the preferable direction for the nation to be moving."

Huhh?!? Is it just me, or aren't there *already* "tens of millions of adults unable to meet the requirements of the new economy"? Maybe central processing misplaced the memo to these guys. Or maybe they just can't read it. Whaddya think?

Holy *crap*.

— Martin Jones Westlin

Singular achievement: The benefits of one-on-one tutoring

LEARN is primarily known for its one-on-one tutor-learner approach. In other words, it likes to do things the fun way. Some would argue that group situations involve the more ideal settings in that they create several avenues for exchange. That school of thought may have its merits — but some studies show that a learner's powers of retention increase if he and his tutor are left to their own devices. And that's a win-win for everybody.

Getting down to the Corps

Just how many national events can one group stand before the fatigue sets in? If you're AmeriCorps, it apparently doesn't matter — so the good folks who run it decided to launch yet another. This one's an entire week long. And as this excerpt from the AmeriCorps Web site reflects, the prospects for service far outweigh the temptation to sleep — to wit:

AmeriCorps Week is a recognition event designed to bring more Americans into service, salute AmeriCorps members and alums for their powerful impact and thank the community partners who make AmeriCorps possible.

AmeriCorps Week provides an opportunity for AmeriCorps members, alums, grantees, program partners and friends to shine a spotlight on the work done by members in communities across the country — and to motivate more Americans to join AmeriCorps or volunteer in their communities.

The first AmeriCorps Week is scheduled for May 13 to 20 and will mark a historic milestone — this spring, the 500,000th AmeriCorps member will take the pledge to "get things done for America."

Several high-profile events will be held in connection with AmeriCorps Week. Current plans include a kickoff event, and the week will end with a giant Habitat for Humanity "blitz build" by more than 500 AmeriCorps members in Gulfport, Miss. Member and other volunteers plan to construct 20 homes for those Gulfporters affected by Hurricane Katrina.

Those with a special interest in AmeriCorps are encouraged to use their creativity to mark the week in any way they see fit. Members and alumni could make presentations to students or community groups. Grantees could stage an open house, a service project or a volunteer fair. Local officials could be asked to serve as an AmeriCorps member for a day. And members could spread the word about the power of service by writing letters or blogging about their AmeriCorps service online.

Jose Cruz, San Diego Council on Literacy chief executive officer, recently took note of some information that supports LEARN's philosophy. He cited a 2005 National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy report that included a study by Kenneth Darkenwald and Gordon Silvestri, who observed 40 learners in a one-on-one program and determined that an open and caring atmosphere, tutor training and support and opportunities for learners to apply their improved skills were the most important factors that appeared to contribute to longer student retention.

The same report reflected the observations of David Knibbe and John Dusewicz, who looked for evidence of one-on-one tutoring's effectiveness in student retention figures. They examined student records 1985 to 1989 in a community-based literacy program. They discovered several factors that can support student retention: focus on student goals and interests, staff support for students and tutors, use of small group instruction for topic-oriented lessons, increased flexibility for students with special needs and opportunities for students to drop into learning centers.

John Comings' 2001 evaluation of five library literacy and ESOL programs that use both one-on-one and small group tutoring reflects that retention is related to learning. Students, it said, learn in programs where they believe in themselves as learners, where they are involved in formulating their own goals and where they understand what they are learning. Students demonstrate commitment to learning by remaining in the programs long enough to accomplish their goals.

Sounds very one-on-one to us.



If this newsletter didn't do it for you...

... then the best we can do is get on our knees and beg you to give us another chance in June. We'll have expanded stories on such august figures as Don DeFrain, who's been tutoring forever and recently received a major Volunteer of the Year honor, and the enterprising Charles Ross, who keeps things rolling at the Laubach Literacy Center of San Diego.

Meanwhile, the fact that Westlin's at the helm notwithstanding, it's great to be back. We hope you missed us as much as we missed you.